

Mike Wheeler's Eight Rules to Being in Love with Your Best Friend by vikingtealight

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Summary:

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Unfortunately, Mike Wheeler has never been very good at following rules.

An alternate POV to Same Page!

Mike Wheeler's Eight Rules to Being in Love with Your Best Friend

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Rule #1: Don't.

The best way to deal with being in love with your best friend is to stop being in love with them. Repress those feelings deep down inside, silence those thoughts swirling around your head until they're a vague whisper in the back of every conversation, too quiet to hear.

For the first 8 years of their friendship, Mike follows this rule pretty well.

It's easy: boys don't like other boys. Will's his friend, and that's it.

Until Dustin makes that dumb comment about Lucas being his best friend. He means it when he tells Dustin that's bullshit, but for days and weeks, Dustin's words are in the back of his head. When he

compares the way he treats his friends, he realizes it isn't Lucas who comes out on top, but Will.

When he gets to school, Will is the one he's most excited to meet up with. Will is the first one he wants to tell about new comics, new movies, the argument he had with Nancy, how weird Mr. Beck smelled today, what his mom made for dinner. He wants to tell Will everything.

But at 13, Mike doesn't know what to make of that. At 13, "don't be in love with your best friend" is not a conscious rule, but instinctively Mike knows those are the kind of feelings you're supposed to ignore—like his parents ignoring that they don't love each other, like Nancy ignoring the way her eyes linger on Jonathan. It's better for everyone if those feelings don't get a voice.

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Rule #2: When you see your best friend kiss another boy, ignore the twisting of your stomach.

Mike somehow feels shocked and not shocked at all when he sees Will kissing a boy outside Hawkins High's gym one afternoon.

He's not surprised because he's always known Will is gay.

The surprising bit is the amount of anger he feels. He imagines himself tearing that boy away from Will and he feels so ashamed for

not being happy for his friend.

Then, the boy says some disgusting, hateful things and Mike wants to hurt him, but he can't get into a fight, not now. Not with Will here. Not somewhere where the gym teacher will hear and demand an explanation about the fight.

He tells Will that he deserves a better boyfriend and pretends like the incident never happened.

Except, after that, the word bisexual keeps popping into his head. He had been thinking he might be bi for awhile now. And then, his feelings were just jealousy about wanting to kiss boys in general, not Will in particular. Right?

But then a few weeks later, Mike sees Will shyly kiss Jennifer Hayes on the cheek. Some dumbass put up mistletoe in the hallway and Will accidentally walked under it without paying attention.

Mike knows Will would never—could never—have feelings for Jennifer Hayes and yet he feels the same twist in his gut.

He can't pretend it's about sexuality anymore; it isn't about wanted to kiss boys, or girls for that matter. It's about him wanting to be the person Will kisses.

Rule #3: When it becomes clear your best friend doesn't feel the same way, distance yourself from them.

When Will tells Mike all the art colleges he was applying to, Mike feels his mind go blank. He doesn't know where he wants to go, what he wants to study, what he wants to become. The only thing he knows about his future was that he wants Will in it.

The college brochures the school counselor passes out talk about class sizes, location, research opportunities; they do not mention distance from the nearest art school, which was the only factor Mike cares about, so they end up in the trash.

But it turns out most art schools are in big cities, and most big cities usually had at least one respectable university. So respectable, it might not even be clear that they're true draw was their proximity to Will's schools. Not that Mike was going to tell Will where he applied. He doesn't want him to figure it out.

Mike knows that this is the exact opposite of what he should be doing. He should be going to schools in a different state than Will, in a different time zone even—no, on the other side of the country, at a minimum. He should be trying to move on. But even if he would never be with Will, he still wants Will to be his best friend, he still needs him in his life. Giving up Will would be like asking Mike to give up his own name; he wouldn't know who he was without Will.

Thankfully, Will chooses Cooper Union which means Mike is going to Columbia—a school choice that doesn't require any explanation.

“Looks like we’re going to New York together,” he tells Will, as if there was any doubt in his mind they’d end up together.

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Rule #4: Don’t read into platonic gestures.

Mike senses something shift during the first year him and Will live together.

They should be sick of each other being cramped into 500 square feet, but instead of retreating to their bedrooms, small enough to be closets, they’re always in their living room. Sometimes they talk and talk, not realizing the sun has slipped below the horizon and a suitable bedtime has come and gone with no of their homework even attempted. Sometimes they sit in silence, Will drawing, Mike reading.

It’s just companionship, Mike tells himself. Friends hang out. That’s all they’re doing.

One night, Will comes home and drops his backpack on the floor with a loud thud.

“What’s wrong?” Mike asks, setting down his gameboy.

“Sometimes,” Will hesitates, looking up at the ceiling, like he always

does when he's trying to avoid crying. "Sometimes, it feels like I'm in way over my head. Everyone in my classes is so talented and they've been in art classes since they were kids. They know shit about art history. I don't know what I'm doing."

"That's bull," says Mike, patting the seat on the couch next to him. "You're a great artist! You're more talented than all of them put together."

"You're my best friend, you have to say that," says Will, slumping against the couch cushions.

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it," says Mike.

"You've never even seen their work," says Will, smiling slightly.

"Yeah, but I've seen Picasso and Monet and Van Gogh since you drag me to MoMA every other weekend," says Mike. "And your art is way better."

"Okay, now I know you're lying because I definitely do not compare to the greatest artists in history," Will shakes his head and smiles. "Yet."

They fall into silence and Will rests his head against Mike's shoulder.

Like friends, Mike thinks. Friends can comfort each other. That's all this

is.

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Rule #5: If you can't ignore your feelings any longer, tell your friend how you feel about them.

One afternoon, Mike comes home from class and calls out, "Will!"

He's worried because Will didn't come home last night—not unheard of, they crash at their friends' places a lot, but he still can't help but think of what happened eight years earlier.

He sees a note on the fridge and feels immediate relief, but the words make him feel like something is lodged in his throat.

Thanks for doing my dishes! You're the best roomie/friend a guy could ask for! I owe you one. -W

He thought he could handle just being Will's friend, but it feels all wrong. He's been lying to his best friend for so many years now he's lost count. He needs to tell Will how he feels even if Will doesn't feel the same way.

Mike rehearses it over and over in his head, *I like you, as more than a friend — no, I have feelings for you — no, I've been thinking about our friendship, our relationship, and I've realized I've always thought of you*

romantically. No, don't say always you sound like a creep who's been pining after him for a decade. Will, I need you to know this doesn't have to change anything. I like you romantic —

And then Will walks through the door and Mike feels his mouth go dry which is odd because the rest of him feels like he's about to drown.

“Hey,” says Will, a huge smile on his face.

“Hi,” Mike says and clears his throat, ready to just say it and get it over with.

“So,” says Will cutting him off. “I met a guy!”

The words die in his throat.

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Rule #6: When your best friend says they love you, remember they don't mean it like that.

Will is drunk.

Mike is tipsy, but not as drunk. He doesn't like to get drunk around

Will—too risky, he can't trust his drunk self to not say anything stupid.

"Fuck him!" says Will.

Mike tries to ignore how hot it is when Will cusses and instead joins in on the ex-boyfriend bashing, "Yeah, fuck him!"

"So why does it feel like my heart is being torn out of my body?"

"Because you love him," Mike says without thinking.

Will scoffs, "No, I wouldn't say that. I liked him, but it definitely wasn't love."

Mike feels a small, awful happiness in his heart. "Maybe you were just lonely, then."

"How could I be lonely as long as I have you?" Will responds, smiling at him.

"Well, you don't have to worry," says Mike staring at his bottle of beer. "You'll always have me."

"I know, and you'll always have me," says Will, clinking his bottle

against Mike's. "'Cause I love you."

Mike knows he doesn't mean it like that. He's sure he doesn't mean it like that, but he can't help but turn to face Will, hoping to see the same feelings he feels reflected back at him.

Will meets his eye and says, "You're my best friend."

"Yeah," says Mike, his voice barely above a whisper. "Best friends."

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Rule #7: When your best friend says something that could either be romantic or platonic, assume it's platonic (see Rule #4).

"I can't believe the biggest snowstorm of the century is happening on your 21st birthday," Mike complains.

"It's fine," says Will. "We didn't really plan anything anyway."

"There was going to be a party for you at MacLaren's. Surprise!"

"That would've been cool, but seriously, if I had to spend my birthday trapped in a cold, shitty apartment with only one other person, I'm glad it's you."

Mike blushes, “You don’t have to say that, it’s your birthday, you don’t need to make me feel better about the situation.”

“I mean it,” Will says, laughing a little. “You’re the best. After all we’ve been through you’re like a brother... If I didn’t already have the best brother in the universe.”

“So, really, you wish you were spending your birthday with Jonathan,” Mike teases.

“No way, he’d insist on taking pictures and refuse to be in any of them, so I’d end up with a bunch of pictures of myself, by myself, on my birthday.”

“That would look pretty pathetic.”

Will picks at their area rug. “Seriously, Mike, you’re my favorite person to spend time with. I don’t think I could ever get tired of talking to you. How on Earth were we lucky enough to grow up down the street from each other? I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have you. You’re the one person who makes me feel like I’m a person, like I’m not crazy—or maybe I am, but it’s okay because we’ll go crazy together, right?”

He smiles at Mike, and Mike smiles back.

“Ugh, enough sappiness right?” Will asks. “If it’s my 21st, I think we’re obligated to drink.”

“I’ll grab the drinks,” says Mike, heading towards the kitchen.

He needs a minute. He can’t just listen to something like that and think that Will doesn’t love him.

Then, he remembers the comment about being brothers.

Yeah, he decides. Beer is definitely necessary for this night .

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Rule #8: Things won’t just magically resolve themselves one day, you need to confront your feelings head-on.

Mike loves walking through Central Park with Will.

He loves doing anything with Will, really, but the park is great because for their usual thirty minute loop, Mike gets to talk to Will with no distractions—no video games, no homework, no other friends, just him and whatever is on Will’s mind.

He decides to make a dumb pun, something about the pathetic excuse

for the trash can they just threw their empty coffee cups into, when Will kisses him.

This can't be real, Mike thinks.

When Will pulls away all too quickly, Mike understands the look on Will's face perfectly: the fear of realizing you're in love with your best friend and they might not feel the same way.

There's so many things he'd like to tell him, most importantly, that he loves him, that he's *always* loved him, but there's plenty of times for words later. Now, he thinks the simplest way to reassure Will that he has nothing to worry about and express how much he loves him and how long he's loved him is to simply press his lips back against Will's.

Afterall, he's been waiting a very, very long time to kiss his best friend. And since he can finally let himself be honest about his feelings, that's exactly what he tells Will.

"It's about time we did that."

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading! I'm @thezoomermax on tumblr.